

'Schools are free': Daycares worried about impact of new pre-primary program ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Some daycares in Nova Scotia say the province's new pre-primary program in schools could lead to staff shortages and daycare closures.

This fall, 43 schools have been chosen to offer pre-primary programming to four year olds.

Patricia Martin is co-director of the Health Park Early Learning Centre in Sydney. She said people in her field are worried about how the new program will affect their futures.

"Losing staff, they're nervous of losing their program itself, and basically they're, financially, they won't be able to survive," she said. "They are charging a fee. Schools are free."

Martin said daycares with infant and toddler programs may be able to adjust and survive but daycares with only preschool children will take a big financial hit if those students move to the school program.

Staffing concerns

The other issue is staffing.

"We are still in a crisis situation for early childhood educators," she said. "If someone is off sick and you need a sub, you really have to scramble to find someone."

Janet Lynn Huntington is director of the Department of Education's early years branch.

She said she plans to meet with institutions in the fall to make sure enough early childhood educators are trained to meet the needs of the pre-primary program and the private child care sector.

Huntington said Education Minister Zach Churchill has indicated the program won't open if enough qualified educators can't be found.

"We are actively recruiting through the school boards to make sure these positions get filled and we are confident that will happen," she told CBC's Information Morning Cape Breton.

'A little bit of panic'

The chair of the Non Profit Directors Association of Nova Scotia, which represents about 30 daycares across the province, is concerned there's still uncertainty about the program that will soon roll out.

"We're seeing a little bit of panic," Lisa Davies said.

"Families don't know whether to pull their children from their current daycare to put them in these programs because they don't know for sure if they are going to run and that's because the staffing hasn't been established yet."

Davies said the program may have been rolled out too quickly.

"My concern lies with the children. Are they going to have really good spaces?" she said.

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Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

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